

## SOME ABORIGINAL FOOD PLANTS OF THE ASHBURTON DISTRICT, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

By MARJORIE P. SCOTT, Pingandie Station, via Meekatharra, W.A.

The Aboriginal food plants discussed below occur in the Upper Ashburton, Gascoyne and Murchison districts of Western Australia. Where available, the name first used is that from the Upper Ashburton. Names originating in the Upper Murchison-Upper Gascoyne districts are also given where available, as some of these are now widely used throughout the region.

I have personally eaten all of the plants listed and have found them to be palatable. Much of the information about their preparation was learnt from my parents, George and Ethel Scott.

Dry seeds, which require grinding, are no longer generally eaten in the Upper Ashburton district, whereas the other more succulent green plants are still partaken.

### No. 1 *Acacia pyrifolia* D.C.

Kuntunu (Ashburton name)

Kantji (Murchison-Gascoyne name)

The dry seed was ground up on a large stone dish with parallel grooves and eaten without cooking. Nowadays, the seeds are eaten green, much as uncooked peas may be eaten by whites. This plant is abundant on Pingandie, Mt Vernon and Mininer stations and on most of the limestone-sandstone country in the district.

### No. 2 *Acacia* sp.

Milhan (Ashburton name)

Wantan (Murchison-Gascoyne name)

The dry seed was coarsely ground and eaten without cooking. The tree is abundant where the Wintamara or Mulga occurs.

### No. 3 *Acacia victoriae* Benth.

Tjampali (Ashburton name)

Kasha (Murchison-Gascoyne name)

The seed was usually eaten green. This bush resembles the Kuntunu or Kantji bush.

### No. 4 *Acacia tetragonophylla* F. Muell.

Tjilkaru (Ashburton name)

Kurara (Murchison-Gascoyne name)

The seeds were either chewed or pounded, ground and eaten without cooking. They have a pleasant, nutty flavour.

### No. 5 *Acacia beauverdiana* Ewart and Sharman

Pukati\* (Ashburton name)

The dry seeds were ground to flour and either cooked as cakes or eaten raw. In addition, the small top branches are burnt to produce a white ash which is mixed with about equal parts of tobacco, moistened with saliva and chewed.

### No. 6 *Acacia aneura* F. Muell.

Wintamara (Ashburton name)

The dry seeds were ground up and eaten without cooking. This plant is the Mulga tree. Winta is the general word for trees in the Ashburton language.

### No. 7 *Dactyloctenium radulans* (R. Br.) Beauv.

Button Grass

No Aboriginal names for this plant are known to me. It is believed that the small seeds were ground up for flour. It grows thickly along rivers after rain.

No. 8 *Cucumis melo* L., s.sp. *agrestis* (Naud.) Greb.

Tjipata (Ashburton name)

The Wild Rock Melon. The fruit are about half an inch long and are ready to eat when they fall from the vine. The rough outer skin is not eaten.

No. 9 *Cynanchum floribundum* R.Br.

Tjipa (Ashburton name)

Dthumara (Murchison-Gascoyne name)

The pod of this creeper is eaten whole, while green. It has a slightly sweet taste.

No. 10 *Leichardtia australis* R.Br.

Wira (Ashburton name)

Kukula (Murchison-Gascoyne name)

When green, the fruit can be eaten raw or cooked. As the fruit ages, part of the inside becomes fibrous, though the centre remains fleshy. At this stage, the centre and the outer part are edible. The flowers are full of nectar and are also eaten. The Wira creeper produces foliage after rain.

No. 11 *Canthium latifolium* F. Muell.

Kulkal (Murchison-Gascoyne name)

The Wild Currant. The small fruits are eaten when they turn black. The Ashburton name is not known to me.

No. 12 *Ipomoea costata* (F. Muell.) Benth.

Intal (Ashburton name)

The tuber, which resembles a sweet potato, is baked in hot ashes and sand. It is quite tasty, but tends to induce feelings of listlessness, depression or weariness. It is regarded as a "slimming food". It resembles the following plant (No. 13) but the tuber of this plant (No. 12) has a fibrous centre. It occurs from about the Ashburton River northward.

No. 13 *Ipomoea ?longiflora* R.Br.

Intal (Ashburton name)

Kulyu (Murchison-Gascoyne name)

The tuber, which resembles and tastes like a sweet potato, is baked in hot ashes and sand. When young, the tuber is whitish and is sometimes eaten uncooked. As it matures, it turns pink and brown. The inside is layered like a beetroot and is more succulent than the preceding plant (No. 12).

Kangaroo meat was preserved by baking and sun drying and then stored in a cave or sheltered place. When required for food, the dried meat was pounded up with succulent Intal and eaten together.

The plant is very similar to the preceding, No. 12, and is known by the same name in the Upper Ashburton district, where both occur. However, this plant ranges from the Ashburton southward, being common in the Gascoyne and Murchison districts.

No. 14 *Cyperus bulbosus* Vahl.

Ngalku (Murchison-Gascoyne name)

The Wild Onion. The Ashburton name is not known to me. This small bulb tastes like an onion. It has a tough husk which has to be removed before eating. In the Ashburton, the bulbs were placed on flat ground and spinifex was burnt over them so that the heat cracked the husks. In the Murchison-Gascoyne, the husks were cracked by being put into hot sand and then removed by rubbing the bulbs on a kangaroo skin.

The plant grows plentifully along creeks, appearing after rain and floods.

## No. 15 *Calandrinia* sp.

Tjanga (Murchison-Gascoyne name)

The Parakeelya plant. This succulent resembles the cultivated Portulacca, but has much thicker stems and foliage. Flowers are yellow, white or pink and the plant spreads over an area of about 2½ feet in diameter. The plant is picked whole, baked in hot sand for a few minutes and eaten. When raw, it has a slightly bitter taste which disappears with cooking.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the following for assistance with various aspects of this article. Mr W. Douglas of the Department of Anthropology, University of Western Australia, kindly advised with the spelling of plant names. The staff of the Western Australian Herbarium, Department of Agriculture, identified the plant specimens. The article was suggested by Mr G. W. Kendrick and the information coordinated by Dr I. M. Crawford, both of the Western Australian Museum.

### FROM FIELD AND STUDY

**New Locality Record for the Western Shrike-Tit, *Falconculus frontatus*.**—A male bird was observed foraging amongst the foliage and branches of Karri trees approximately 7 miles south of Shannon. The area is typical Karri forest but it has been opened up by logging operations and large tracts of young regeneration are present.

Previously this bird has not been recorded from the heavily forested areas and only occasionally from the fringes, viz. along the Blackwood River at Boyup Brook, Karridale in 1961 and at Irwin's Inlet in 1912-13. (Serventy and Whittell, *Birds of Western Australia*, 1967).

—P. CHRISTENSEN, Manjimup.

**Crested Penguin near Augusta.**—On January 6th, 1972, my son, Michael, found a Crested Penguin, *Eudyptes chrysocome*, on the beach, in Flinders Bay (34° 20' S, 115° 12' E), about 3 km east of the mouth of the Blackwood River.

It was a young bird in the process of moulting, making it difficult to separate from the similar species *E. pachyrhynchus* and *E. sclateri*, i.e. it could not be determined if the crest did or did not meet above the eyes.

However the large subterminal black patch under the flipper, as described in *Birds of Western Australia*, 4th edition, p.72, was quite apparent.

The bird was taken home overnight for identification and when returned to the beach next day, entered the sea for a drink before seeking partial shelter on the beach.

—M. C. ELLIS, Manning.

**An Occurrence of a Yellowfin Tuna, *Thunnus albacares*, in the Swan River.**—At 3 p.m., April 8, 1972, Mr R. Miller of Esperance observed a large fish swimming slowly in shallow water near the jetty at Matilda Bay, some 10 miles up river. Mr Miller jumped into the water and after quite a struggle managed to haul it on to the bank where it was killed. The fish was taken to the house of Mr C. Weir of Mt. Lawley where it was filleted. I examined the head and complete skeleton of the fish and identified it as a Yellowfin Tuna measuring 127 cm from tip of snout to fork of tail. Salinity determinations were made by Mr J. Kowarsky, Zoology Department, University of Western Australia, at Mosman Park and Point Heathcote, Swan River between 8.15 and 8.45 a.m. April 10, 1972; these were 34.5°/oo and 34.2°/oo respectively; bottom temperatures were 20.2°C and 19.8°C. This is the first record of a tuna entering the Swan River.

—R. J. MCKAY, Western Australian Museum.